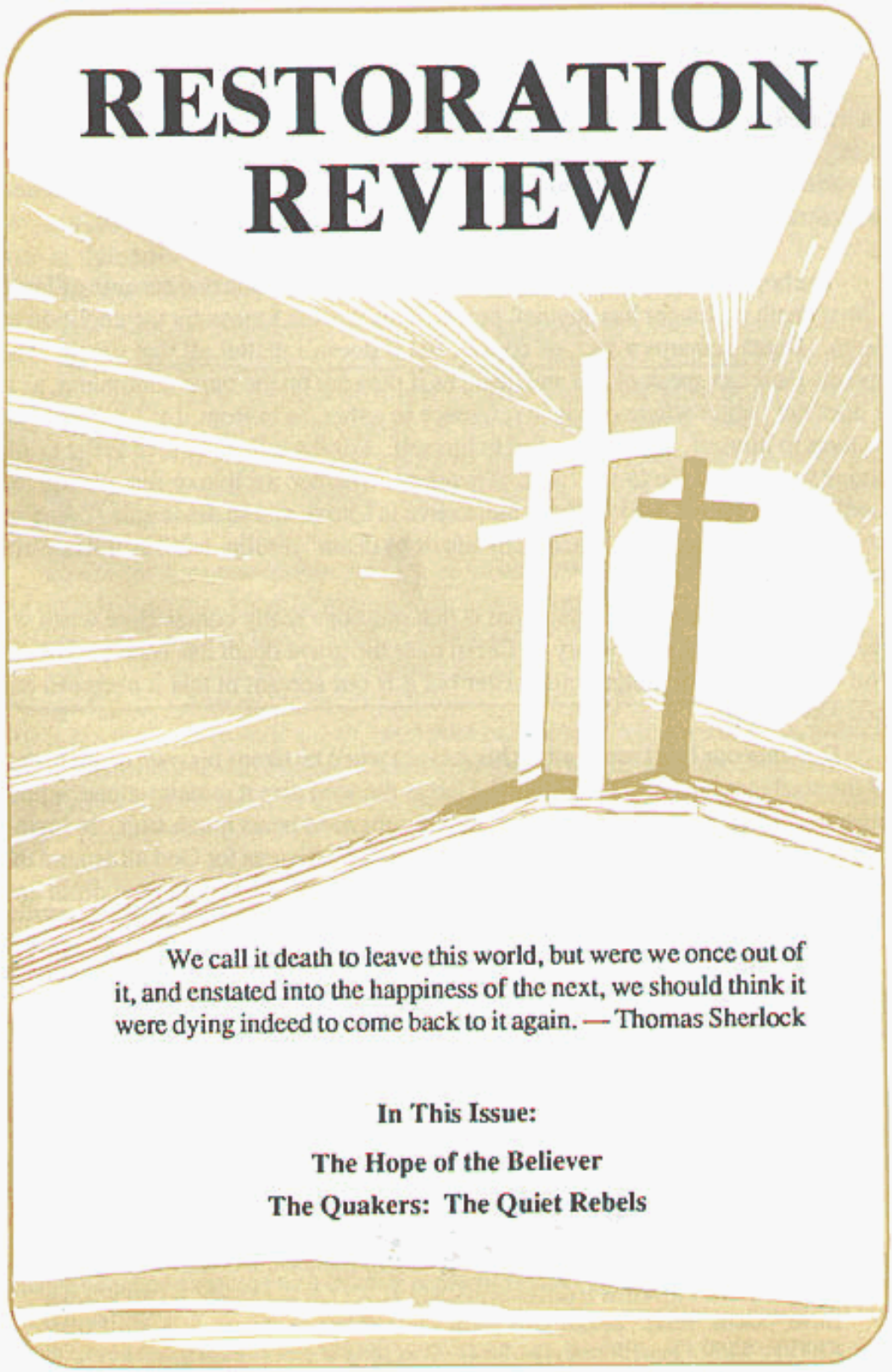
RESTORATION REVIEW



We call it death to leave this world, but were we once out of it, and enstated into the happiness of the next, we should think it were dying indeed to come back to it again. — Thomas Sherlock

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Volume 31, No. 3 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **March, 1989**

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Restoration Review, Vol. 31, No. 3, March 1989

The Hope of the Believer...No. 3

THE ABOLITION OF DEATH

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. - Jn. *12:24*

The hope of the believer *is* strengthened by the conviction that because of Jesus Christ death no longer has any real power. This is what I mean by the abolition of death. Death remains a fact, of course, but it doesn't matter all that much. The apostle Paul can speak: of life and death as if they are on the same continuum, as if it does not matter where one is in reference to either, as in Rom. 14:7-8: "None of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's," and Philip. 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." And so he uses such language as "whether by life or by death" (Philip. 1:20) as if it doesn't matter which.

So, our thesis in this installment is that our hope really comes alive when we realize that through the victory of Christ over the grave death has been abolished. Not only is death no longer our master but it is our servant in that it becomes our gateway to glory.

Does not our Lord see death as his servant when he likens his own death to that of the seed that falls into the ground? Unless the seed dies it remains alone, which means that it doesn't bear fruit. But in dying the seed bears much fruit. In laying down his life Jesus produced a great community of believers for God all around the world. But there was no other way. He had to die. He thus conquered death and made it his servant.

This differs remarkably from one thing that Paul says about death. The apostle sees death as the result of sin: "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). We have to die because of sin, Paul says. Sin even has death as its wages (Rom. 6:23). But Jesus says we have to die in order to bear fruit, provided believers are included in his parable of the dying seed. Rather than being contradictory these are different perspectives of death. The apostle refers to the origin of death. It came into the world through sin, he says. Jesus refers to the purpose of death. It was only by dying that he was to bear much fruit, he says.

What Jesus said about his own death is true of all believers in one important way: *God fulfills His purpose in us only by our dying.* If we do not, like the grain of wheat, undergo death then we too will abide alone, that is, we will not experience all that God intends for us. It is also probable that we too, like Jesus, have fruit to bear in dying and moving into another world, if not in the same way. There is therefore a crucial role for death to play in the scheme of things.

I find our Lord's emphasis more hopeful than Paul's, which impresses me as more philosophical than edifying. It doesn't buoy me up to be told that I have to die because I've sinned or because of Adam's sin, or both. But when death is placed before me as life's greatest adventure, as the gateway to glory, and as a crucial milestone in the fulfillment of God's purpose for me, I can thank God for death and join the poet John Milton in saying, "Death is the golden key that opens the palace of eternity."

Paul does not belabor the idea of sin being the reason for death, certainly not outside Romans. He offers more hope when he says, "When I am absent from the body," a clear reference to death, "I am present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). And in 1 Cor. 15:36 he uses the same imagery Jesus did about the dying seed when he answers a question about the nature of the resurrected body: "Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive until it dies," and goes on from there to give us as an exalted view of death as one will find anywhere in Scripture. Referring to the body that dies and is sown like the seed, he says: "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (verse 44).

How exciting such revelation is! Notice that the apostle is careful to avoid any reference to the body as being buried. Not buried but sown! One always sows in expectation of reaping. And Paul puts death as the access from the natural body to the spiritual body. He stresses the fact that there is indeed a spiritual body, but only in the next world, beyond the resurrection. And how does the believer get there? By dying like the seed dies. So, the apostle has a much higher concept of death than seeing it merely as the penalty of sin. We have already seen that Paul even longed for death, for in death he would "gain" Christ (Philip. 1:23).

But it is Jesus himself who lays the groundwork for our hope in death. The most impressive instance is what he said to the thief on the cross: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43). This proves beyond doubt that Jesus believed in life after death and that it follows immediately after death. And it shows that one can die as a thief, a penitent one we presume, and go directly to heaven at death. Men are never so serious as when they are dying. Jesus did not simply wish the thief well or merely show concern for him. Or express hope that the thief might find God's mercy. He spoke with assurance and without equivocation. *Assuredly,* he says to him, *today you will* be *with* me *in Paradise.* But

for that wonderful promise to be realized something very mundane had to happen: both Jesus and the thief had to die. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone."

If Jesus extends that same promise to us, that we will be with him in heaven the day we die, do we need anything more? And if we believe that can't we say that death is not only not to be feared but to be welcomed? Indeed, true believers can say with Tennyson, "Sweet is death who puts an end to pain," and add a line of their own *and opens up for us joys forever more.*

And what glorious hope our Lord gave us in this promise:

> In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may he also. (Jn. 14:2-3)

While we can't be sure what Jesus meant by mansions, it may be that he referred to inns or abodes along the way. In heaven we will continue to grow and work and learn and serve as if on an eternal journey into deeper fellowship with God. Along the way there will be resting places of exceeding great joy. Whatever mansions may be, they are in heaven and they are in some way for those of us who do not lose hope that Jesus will come again and receive us unto himself. Again, it is in his words that we have all the assurance we need, "that where I am there you may be also."

And again, unless his coming circumvent it, death is the threshold to that to that glorious promise. That makes death a "coming" in itself. If he does not come to claim us while we are yet in this world, then we shall go to him when death calls, sweet death.

That Jesus abolished death is indicated in such promises as, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (Jn. 5:24). This shows that the believer has eternal life now as well as in the future, and that he enjoys life in God now, death no longer having power over him. The believer "dies" only in the sense that he leaves his earthly body and this world. But death ends nothing. The eternal life he has now, and all the consciousness that goes with it, continues through death and on into heaven. So-called death is but the doorway. It is like stepping from one room into another.

Jesus puts it even stronger in Jn. 8:51: "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." This is why we can refer to "so-called death," for it really isn't death if by death one means the end of things. Nothing ends for the believer. Life does not end; memory does not end; consciousness does not end; growth of soul does not end; service to God does not end; fellowship with God and with the church does not end.

When Jesus said this — that the believer would never taste death — it was too much for his critics. They accused him of having a demon, and they pointed to Abraham and the prophets as being dead. They scorned him with, "Who do You make Yourself to be?" They could not believe that Jesus had abolished death. They declared him foolish by pointing to the tombs of the prophets.

Our Lord's answer to this was that Abraham and the prophets are not really dead but are as alive as ever. Not only did Jesus tell them that "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (Jn. 8:56), which refers to the patriarch's prophetic insight, but in Lk. 20 he lays down such truths about the state of the righteous dead that it could be concluded that Abraham was also a witness to the work of Christ from heaven. In that chapter Jesus insists that when the Scriptures show God to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it does not mean that He is the God of dead people, or people who no longer exist. In Lk. 20:38 Jesus says, "He is not the God of the dead but of the living. for all live unto him." How pregnant with hope that great truth is!

Jesus' reasoning was typical rabbinic logic and irrefutable. God is the God of Abraham, etc., but He is not the God of the dead but of the living; therefore Abraham, etc. are living. Jesus not only declares that Abraham is alive but "All live unto Him." This does not necessarily mean that all who have died are redeemed, but it at least means that all the dead are still in existence and are conscious. We might wonder if this great truth influenced Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to write: There is no death! What seems so is transition; this life of mortal breath is but a suburb of the life elysian, whose portal we call death.

Certainly John Bunyan, who went to prison for his faith in Christ, drew upon this hope when he wrote:

> Let dissolution come when it will, it can do the Christian no harm, for it will he but a passage out of a prison into a palace; out of a sea of troubles into a haven of rest; out of a crowd of enemies, to an innumerable company of true, loving, and faithful friends; out of shame, reproach, and contempt, into exceeding great and eternal glory.

I have searched for illustrations that point up the great truth that death, as Bunyan puts it, is but "a passage out of a prison into a palace," or "but a suburb of the life elysian," as Longfellow puts it. My favorite is that of the bird yet encased in its egg shell. Ornithologists

tell us that if one puts the egg close to his ear he can hear the bird pecking at the shell, struggling to be released. If it can be said that life really begins for the bird when it passes through the shell, for only then can it attain the heights that its Creator intended for it, then it can be said of us that life really begins when we die, for only then are we able to become in all eternity what God intends for us.

Then there is the lowly caterpillar that is transformed into a colorful butterfly. Even if we could communicate with the caterpillar there would be no way for us to describe the glory that awaited it. That may be why the Bible makes no more effort than it does to describe the glories of heaven. C. S Lewis says that if we could see ourselves as we will be in glory that we would be tempted to fall down and worship ourselves.

Another illustration I like, one that points up the truth that consciousness continues even when the brain and the body decay, is of the great violinist who continues to play even if his violin is smashed. He only needs to take another violin. That is, his playing does not depend on the instrument he has in hand, for his great music is in his heart and soul and he is not dependent on any one instrument. While it is true that we depend on our brain for consciousness in this world, it does not mean that consciousness ceases to be when the brain ceases to be, for beyond death there are other instruments for consciousness to use.

Ah, for that great truth, *There is a spiritual body!* Here we live in a natural body; there we will live in a spiritual body. That body cannot be and will not be without soul, spirit, consciousness, memory - always growing, always learning, always laboring in the Father's vast universe, and somehow non-spatial and non-temporal. There is no way to grow old and no way to be crowded!

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13). That says it all, one reason being that they are not really dead. — *the Editor*

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

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WHICH OF OUR CHURCHES WOULD CAMPBELL JOIN?

Am I asked why I am not a party man? or why I do not join a party? I ask in return, Which party would the Apostle Paul join if now on earth? Or, in other words, which party would receive him? — Alexander Campbell

Alexander Campbell made that statement when he was only 22 years old and belonged to no denomination. Having "walked out" of a Presbyterian sect back in Ireland, he was now in America where he joined his father in a movement to "unite the Christians in all the sects." His father, Thomas Campbell, had come to America two years before his son's arrival, and he also had had such unfortunate experiences with the same Presbyterian party in the new world that he too saw himself as belonging to no sect. It is remarkable that both men saw themselves disenfranchised by their church by experiences involving the Lord's Supper.

Back in Scotland where Alexander was studying at Glasgow University while waiting to join his father in America, he had extra curricular activities that afforded him such intimate contact with reformation movements in that country that he could no longer be the "sublimated Pharisee" that he once described himself as being. The moment of truth came for him on a Sunday afternoon in 1809 when he was waiting to take Communion in a gathering of his Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church. He held in his hand a metal token that allowed him to enter the Communion room.

Realizing that the reformers with whom he had been associating would not be allowed to break bread with him since they belonged to a different party, young Campbell dropped the token in the plate and walked out without partaking of Communion. His biographer, Robert Richardson, dates Campbell's own reformation efforts in America from that dramatic event back in Scotland. It was now evident that he could no longer belong to a Presbyterian sect or any other sect. Such was his disposition of mind when he made the above statement about belonging to no sect.

Thomas Campbell had every intention of remaining a Presbyterian when he began his ministry on the growing edge of the American frontier, even though he too had had such ecumenical experiences back in the old world that he had already begun to think in terms of the unity of all Christians. Since preachers were few and far between on the frontier, he sought to serve all believers equally, and this included the serving of the Lord's Supper. When his superiors heard that he was practicing "open" Communion, it set in motion a series of events that led to his expulsion from his denomination.

These circumstances set the stage for the dramatic events that followed, once father and son were united in western Pennsylvania. The same year that Alexander arrived in America Thomas Campbell wrote the Declaration and Address, which one historian has described as "a prospectus of the reformation" that he had begun. He had also organized the Christian Association of Washington as a beachhead for his unity movement. Born full grown as a preacher, Alexander preached his first sermon and began to itinerate among a frontier people, mostly in homes and the out-of-doors. People were saying that he was even a better preacher than his father.

In 1810 they organized their first congregation at Brush Run, though it was not their intention to start another denomination. On the very first Lord's day, before they had a building, they spread the Lord's table under the shade of the great elms that served as their cathedral. From that day until now the people that have their roots in the Campbell movement have not missed a Lord's day breaking bread together.

Alexander married the following year, and when his first child was born he was forced to make a decision about infant baptism, which he had begun to question. His subsequent study of baptism, which included the Greek New Testament, led him not only to discard infant baptism but to submit himself to baptism by immersion. When the time came his father joined him in being immersed. This was some two years after they had founded the Brush Run Church of Christ, which means that while they met in the name of Christ and broke bread each Lord's day it was still an unimmersed congregation, except for a few who had been immersed before the Campbells were. Were they Christians and a true Church of Christ?

The Campbells certainly believed they were Christians (and members of the Church of Christ!) all those years that they were "sprinkled as infants" Presbyterians. This is why they were hesitant to be baptized again, for it looked as if they were "going out of the church only to come back into it," as Thomas put it. But Alexander decided that he had never been scripturally baptized, and so he was immersed strictly on the basis of his confession that Jesus is the Christ, which the Baptist minister who immersed him admitted to be "contrary to Baptist usage but consistent with New Testament practice."

This is where Alexander Campbell was when he made the statement that leads this article. He was not a party man and had joined no party. He had belonged to a party but had left it. While he had formed a congregation after the ancient order as he then understood it (He continued to grow and change), he had no intention of starting another party or denomination.

If we at this juncture transport Alexander Campbell by way of a time tunnel to our situation, we can appropriately ask which of our various segments or fellowships (euphemisms for sects?) would he join? To answer that we should look at his more extended answer to the question he raised back in 1810. "I dare not be a party man for these reasons," he said, and he gave four reasons, as follows:

1. Because Christ has forbidden me. He has commanded us to keep the "unity of the spirit."

2. Because no party will receive into communion all whom God would receive into heaven. God loves his children more than our creeds, and man was not made for the Bible, but the Bible for man.

3. The man that promotes the interests of a party stands next in guilt to the man that made it.

4. Because all parties oppose reformation. They all pray for it, but they will not work for it.

It is remarkable that Campbell at such an early age had such a grasp of the principles he was to give his life to, such as his awareness of the sinfulness of division among Christians. The church has been slow to realize that *Christ forbids partyism.* And he had the Bible in proper perspective, seeing it as a means to an end, not the end itself. "Man was not made for the Bible, but the Bible for man," he recognized, which means that while sectarianism seeks to stretch man to fit its interpretation of the Bible, the peacemaker seeks to adapt the Bible to the needs of man by recognizing that the point of the Bible is to show that God is for man and not against him. And Campbell saw early on what his own life testified to and what all history confirms: *Every party will oppose and even persecute its reformers, even while it prays for reformation!*

But it is in his second reason that Campbell gives the essence of his plea for unity, which is all the reason anyone needs for not being a party man: *No party will receive into communion all whom God would receive into heaven.* Campbell is saying that wherever God has a child he has a brother or sister and that he will accept him or her as such. He is saying that a sect receives only those who conform to its party line, rejecting others that God will receive into heaven. So, Campbell is saying that he will join no party because it will not receive all those that God receives.

There we have our answer. We are not true heirs of the unity movement that Campbell launched if we reject any of God's children over our opinions and our particular interpretations of Scripture. When we insist that Christians must sing acappella like we do, speak in tongues like we do, interpret the millennium like we do, see the "marriage question" like we do, serve the Supper precisely as we do, baptize exactly as we do, and conform to all our unique methods and interpretations, allowing for no honest differences of opinion, we are a party and sectarian to the core. And Alexander Campbell would pass us by in his quest for a non-sectarian people.

Some years ago I was giving an address in Murfreesboro, Tn. on our heritage in the Restoration Movement. It was in a neutral location, for even though we had several congregations of the Movement in that city, none felt free to have the likes of me on its premises. (On second thought I recall that I did address the Disciples of Christ the Sunday morning I was in town.) Louis and Bess Cochran, historians of our heritage and Disciples of Christ, were in the audience, and in the open forum that followed my presentation, Louie asked me which of our three churches of the Movement would Alexander Campbell join if he lived today.

I turned the question back on him, wanting to know how he would answer it, being the Campbell scholar that he was (and what a prince of a man he was!). He thought Campbell might join the Churches of Christ since he objected to instrumental music. At this point his wife Bess spoke up, objecting to her husband's conclusion. "I don't think he would have anything to do with any of us, for we have all departed from what he stood for!" And I concluded that there is a time when the woman should have the last word.

But I answer the question in a different way. Campbell viewed the church more in terms of individual Christians and local congregations than he did in terms of denominational bodies. His plea for unity was a unity of believers, not a union of denominations. And I am persuaded that if Alexander Campbell lived in your community he would search out a congregation, irrespective of denomination, that came nearest to exemplifying the freedom of the Christian faith as set forth in his reasons for not being a party man. Even if Campbell joined a party, he would not be a party man, which is where many believers are today, in a party but not of a party.

Alexander Campbell was a forbearing man. He would work with any church that showed a willingness to grow in the grace of God and to manifest the spirit of Christ. He knew that no church is perfect and he was tolerant of those who were innocently in error. He often

distinguished between errors of the mind and errors of the heart, and so he could enjoy fellowship with those who are right in heart even if wrong in doctrine. It was this attitude that led him to write as follows about his party spirit earlier in life:

> I was once so straight that, like the Indian's tree, I leaned a little the other way. I was so strict a Separatist that I would neither pray nor sing praises with anyone who was not as perfect as I supposed myself to be. In this most unpopular course I persisted until I discovered the mistake and saw that on the principle embraced in my conduct, there never could be a congregation or a church upon the earth.
>
> This plan of of making my own nest, and fluttering over my own brood; of building our own tent, and confining all goodness and grace to our noble selves and the "elect few" who are like us, is the quintessence of sublimated pharisaism. *(Christian Baptist,* 1826)

Now that we've seen the magnanimous, non-sectarian spirit that Campbell finally came to have, a more appropriate question to ask might be one that he himself raised in our opening quotation: *Would any of our churches today receive Alexander Campbell? - the Editor*

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

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ARE WE TO EELLOWSHIP THE UNIMMERSED?

My opinion is that immersion is the only baptism. But shall I therefore make my opinion a term of Christian fellowship? If in this case I thus act, where shall I cease from making my opinions terms of fellowship? I confess I see no end. — Barton W. Stone, *Christian Messenger,* 1831, p.19.

You may agree that opinions should not be made tests of fellowship and yet insist that immersion is not an opinion but a matter of fact. Barton Stone anticipated you when he made the above statement, for he added: "You may say that immersion is so plainly the meaning of Christian baptism, you know not how any honest man can be ignorant of it. This is the very language of all opinionists."

He goes on to refer to the doctrine of the trinity as an opinion, though trinitarians insist that it is a fact of Scripture. Then he says, "So speak all Sectarians respecting their opinions."

It is impressive that while Stone was an avowed immersionist, noting on one occasion that there was not one in 500 among his churches that was not immersed, he nonetheless admitted that it was an opinion and should not therefore be made a test of fellowship.

What is an opinion? While Stone does not say it in so many words, he seems to understand an opinion to be a viewpoint held on a matter that honest, intelligent people may see differently. That is close to what Webster says, "a belief not based on absolute certainty or positive knowledge but on what seems true, valid, or probable to one's own mind." Is not the mode of baptism of this character? We might see the evidence for baptism by immersion only as overwhelmingly convincing (to us at least, as it was to Stone), and yet concede that it is not absolutely certain. If it is not "positive knowledge" it is an opinion. Even if we insist that immersion only is "next to certain" it is still an opinion.

One might ask that if immersion only is not an absolute fact what would be. There are many incontrovertible facts in Scripture. Baptism is one, for it is universally agreed that baptism was a practice of the early church. It is the exact mode and design that are questioned. Christ himself is an absolute fact of Scripture, but the *nature* of Christ is a matter of opinion. A fact is what is actually said or done. An opinion is what the fact or the thing done is made to mean. Jesus' words, "My Father is greater than I," is a statement of fact, and we can all agree that he said that. But we do not agree on what he meant by it. Fact and opinion.

If we insist that baptism by immersion only is a matter of absolute fact, we have the problem of explaining why most Christians through the centuries, who are as honest and intelligent as ourselves, have not seen it as we have. An interesting book on the history of the dispute about baptism, entitled *The Water That Divides,* shows that the issue is not as simple as we have supposed. He notes that while there is universal agreement that baptism was often by immersion in the New Testament, it is not universally agreed that all baptisms were by immersion. And so throughout the history of the church, the author states, baptism has been administered by immersion, pouring, and sprinkling.

How are we as immersionists to react to the fact that most professed Christians have not been baptized by immersion? Do we accept them into our fellowship or reject them? If we reject them, we are implying by our action that the vast majority of the Christians in the world are not really Christians. If we accept them, we may suppose we are being untrue to what we understand the Bible to teach.

It is noteworthy that the founding pioneer of the Restoration Movement, if we name only one man, and one who adamantly defended and practiced baptism by immersion, would not go so far as to refuse fellowship to the unimmersed. He did not believe there was any violation of Scripture in accepting them. In fact these words from the same essay that contains the above quotation indicates that he believed he would violate the spirit of Scripture if he did not accept them:

> But says one, I cannot have communion with an unimmersed person; because he is not a member of the church of Christ, however pious and holy he may be. I ask, is he a heathen, or publican? for such is the character of those excluded from the church, Mt. 18. All are either for or against Christ the Lord. "He that is not with me is against me." Shall we say, all are the enemies of Christ who are not immersed? We dare not. If they are not enemies, or if they are not against him they are for him and with him; shall we reject those who are with Jesus, from us? Shall we refuse communion with those with whom the lord communes?

Stone asks some hard questions in this appeal for a broader fellowship. "Shall we make immersion the test of religion?", he asks, "and shall we center all religion on this one point?" He asks why immersion is emphasized more than the love of God, holiness, mercy, and self denial. He argues that if God could accept Cornelius before he was immersed, we should be able to accept those who have not yet attained to our understanding. He urges that we show caution in rejecting those that God accepts.

If you say it is a question of accepting those who are truly our brothers and sisters in Christ, Stone would agree, and he gives a definition to that end: "Let us acknowledge all to be our brethren who believe in the Lord Jesus, and humbly and honestly obey him as far as they know his will and their duty."

It is in that definition that I believe we have our answer as to whom we should accept: *All those who are following Christ the best they know how.* In doing so we are approving of no error they may mistakenly hold. We are compromising no truth that we hold. In an atmosphere of loving acceptance we can teach with "longsuffermg and doctrine" what we believe about baptism by immersion. We will likely immerse more people this way than by leaving the impression that we think baptism is the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith. This was the case with Stone and his churches, for while he had this liberal view toward the unimmersed he could nonetheless report that virtually everyone was immersed sooner or later, "not one in 500 is not immersed," as he put it.

Stone's more open view of fellowship is easier to see when we have a less institutional, organizational concept of the church. When we think in terms of becoming part of an organization or adding names to an official membership list, we are likely to think in more exacting and legalistic terms. But when we work alongside a nun in a city slum clothing the

naked, with a Red Cross worker in rescuing victims in an earthquake zone, or with one from the Salvation Army in a soup kitchen, we are likely have a different view of fellowship, especially when we see a commitment to Christ on their part greater than our own.

If we can work with a nun in a slum to the glory of God, we should be able to enjoy fellowship with her in the assembly of the saints, not because she is a nun but because she loves and serves Jesus just as we do. Perhaps we cannot accept her in "our church" or in "our party" but certainly in a gathering of the Body of Christ! Jesus said, "If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" (Jn. 12:26). Let us be followers of God as beloved children. — *the Editor*

Indeed, *The Christian Baptist* contains some of the wisest and most tolerant of Christian writings. In his May, 1826 "Letter to an Independent Baptist" who had protested his association with other religious parties, Alexander Campbell revealed himself to be as all-inclusive and as modern as tomorrow's sunrise in his statement on tolerance and understanding among Christians. - Louis Cochran *in The Sage of Bethany, p.75*

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Visiting Other Churches: New Series, No.3...

THE QUAKERS: THE QUIET REBELS

Of all the 70 churches I have visited in my home town of Denton, Texas the Quaker church was the smallest, except that they do not use the word church. I responded to a notice on the church page of our local paper — "Society of Friends (Quakers)" it read, giving only a phone number. The lady who answered the phone, a "birthright Quaker" and a nearby neighbor, invited me to their next "Meeting," which is held only monthly. It was to be at her home on a Sunday afternoon.

There were only four of us present. Having ascertained that I had attended Quaker meetings before (when I was a student at Harvard), they did not bother to apprise me of the uniqueness of their gathering. After a delightful tea together prior to the service, the four of us quietly took our places in her living room. The only other man present, a university professor, was asked by the hostess to lead the service. But it could just as well have been led by a woman, for traditionally Quakers have made no sexual distinctions and have always had women ministers. Neither have their enemies made that distinction, imprisoning and hanging the women as well as the men during their dark days of persecution.

In most Quaker services, however, there is little "leading" to do. It is the Spirit or the Inner Light that leads, and quite literally as they see it. There was nothing said, no introduction, no suggestion as to what to meditate upon. No hymn, no prayer, no reading. We simply sat there together for one hour, presumably meditating. Since I realized what the meeting meant to them, that they were communing with the Inner Light that is within us all, which is seen more or less as Christian, I sought to do as they were doing. But it takes a certain discipline, along with years of practice. I would think about the goodness of God for awhile and recall some of the great promises of Scripture, and I would pray "in the spirit," but still my mind would sometimes wander. I found myself thinking about how noisy things were by contrast at my own church that I had earlier attended that same day!

Silence is basic to Quaker worship, a kind of art. Their scholars have written voluminously about silence! It is a matter of coming to terms with oneself, but more than that. It is not only communion with God but with each other. One might wonder why they don't just stay home and be silent if that is all they do once they gather. But there is virtue in "meeting," a vital term in Quaker religion, for the Spirit moves, reveals, and enlightens in the meeting of quiet seekers.

I supposed that one or more of the three Quakers would eventually speak up with a "message," which would be the result of communing with the Inner Light, but none did, which may be interpreted to mean that the Light laid nothing on their hearts urgent enough to pass along or that it was strictly personal. The leader ended the silence by beginning conversation of a general sort, part of which was political. I was surprised that "at church" he would make some very anti-Reagan judgments, rather hateful I thought for a supposedly humble Quaker. He was incensed by Reagan's aid-to-the-Contras policy in Nicaragua. That a Quaker would oppose such a policy did not surprise me, but the vindictiveness did. While I did not agree with his conclusions, I remained silent and nonaggressive, in spite of my inclinations to the contrary. I left the meeting a bit self-righteous, supposing that I had been a better "Quaker" than he. It was not the best of experiences.

I had a better experience when I visited the Friends Meeting House in Cambridge, Mass., an historic edifice that is enclosed by an old brick wall, a Quaker shrine that dates back several generations. We gathered in an elegant but simple room with uncushioned pews that faced each other in horseshow fashion. While there was a "front" of sorts, there was no table, no pulpit, and no furnishing except the pews. Quakers practice no ordinances, such as baptism and Communion. There is usually no singing, no prayers, no readings, no preaching. The children were in First Day school (Traditionally they avoid using the Roman names for days of the week since they are names of gods, so Sunday is First Day, Monday Second Day, etc.), leaving the adults at peace in their "Meeting," which began promptly at 9 a.m.

We sat in an impressive silence for 26 minutes. The antiquity and simplicity of the room enhanced the quietness. Then a woman spoke up, a professor in a nearby university, and quoted something from Tagore, the Indian philosopher. She spoke no more than two minutes. Nine more minutes of silence. Then a man spoke up about something he had read about the Billy Graham revival that had recently been in the area, wondering to what extent this might be reflective of a longing for God. Then several others spoke, six perhaps, for a few moments each, words of encouragement. Then there was more silence, giving the hearers an opportunity to ponder on what had been said. The idea is that the Light is speaking through those who break the silence and so the "Meeting" is enlightened by the Spirit, who moves through the "Meeting." Or something akin to that.

Promptly at 10 a.m. the meeting ended when the "clerk," who was seated with the rest of us, arose and started shaking hands, but still in silence. We left the room in silence. In the foyer of the quaint old place I had the good fortune of conversing genially with several of them, telling them that I was doing my Ph.D. at Harvard under the guidance of a noted Quaker scholar, Henry J. Cadbury, whom they recognized as one of the great Quakers of the 2Oth century.

About the time I arrived at Harvard, Prof. Cadbury had recently returned from Stockholm, Sweden, where he had received the Nobel Peace Prize in behalf of the American Friends Service Committee, which he served as chairman. Always simply dressed even at Harvard, which is not atypical for a Quaker, Cadbury had to rent appropriate attire for the occasion. The Nobel committee honored the Quakers for their works of mercy around the world, especially in those nations bereft by war, including America's enemies. So impressive were their kindly deeds in devastated Germany following World War I, especially in feeding hungry children, that the German people could not believe what they were seeing. Similar impressions have been made in Vietnam and other nations through the years. The Quakers are adept at "Doing Good," which is the title of a book written about their worldwide humanitarian projects by a non-Quaker.

I came to equate Quakerism with my kind and genial professor. He would do things like invite Ouida and me to his home for Thanksgiving, realizing that we were far from home and probably nowhere to go. While he was one of the world's eminent New Testament scholars, his simple ways and humble spirit were disarming. Prof Cadbury had a reputation as "a notorious liberal" and I as a confirmed conservative but I soon saw that he was willing for me to believe what I pleased, so long as I could defend it.

We had some good times together and we came to respect each other despite our differences. One day in class, in which every student already had at least two degrees, we were weighing the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. A Unitarian minister insisted that the resurrection narratives have to be rejected since they are too good to be true. The consensus of the class, including the professor, was that that was reason enough to be suspicious of the resurrection story, it was too good to be true, that the witnesses were idealizing. As the only one in class who was a believer, I spoke up and said something like, "Thank God that the evidence is such that I can believe that what is too good to be true is indeed true!" Prof. Cadbury, who had many Quaker brethren who believed as I did, gave his inimitable grin and looked to the class for a response, and finally said something like, "Yes, maybe that is a good reason for believing it. It is too good to be true!"

I remember many such anecdotes, but the one that impressed me the most was when Prof, Cadbury let his Quaker pacifism show in such an impressive way. "It isn't so bad for a man to die," he said, "but it is terribly bad for me to kill him." That statement had it all — ethos, pathos, logos. The character of the man who said it, the passion with which he said it, the forceful logic of the statement.

When Margaret Bacon, who authored *The Quakers: The Quiet Rebels* from which we borrow the title for this essay, was writing Prof. Cadbury's biography, she wrote to me as one of his old students, asking me to recall as I might from my association with him. She quoted from me several times in the book she called, Let *This Life Speak.* Cadbury's life did indeed speak, and that is the way I see Quakerism. It speaks. It speaks of peace, goodwill, nonviolence, sanity, and moral responsibility.

But Margaret Bacon's description of Quakers as quiet rebels could be and has been questioned, for they have not always been quiet even if always rebels, especially in their early history. Emerging from the Puritan movement of 17th century England, which was itself the work of rebels and reformers, the Quakers went beyond the Puritans in their effort to restore New Testament Christianity, especially in reference to the leading of the Holy Spirit. George Fox (1624-1691), their founder, was in and out of jail most of his life for believing in Spirit-possession, preaching what he called "the Truth," proclaiming "the day of the Lord", and

disrupting others' religious services. He is recognized by modern historians as an extremist and a radical, but as Elton Trueblood, a Quaker historian, says in regard to Fox, quoting Alfred North Whitehead, "True greatness is always characterized by extremism."

Called "Quakers" because they seemed to tremble under the leading of the Spirit but calling themselves "Friends" as Jesus referred to his disciples (but always only as a "Society" and never as a church), there were more than 30,000 of them by 1660 in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and the American colonies. They came to he hated, imprisoned, and even martyred by the authorities for their peculiarities, such as the simplicity of their dress, the way they talked ("thee" and "thou" to highborn and lowborn alike), refusal to doff their hats to superiors or to take oaths, and for rejecting outward forms of religion. Even though the Puritans setup Massachusetts Bay Colony Lobe free of the religious oppression back in Europe, they did not extend that freedom to the Quakers when they came to the new world. They were expelled from the colony, imprisoned if they returned, and in some cases were executed. Four Quakers, one a woman, were executed in public hangings on Boston Common in 1659 and 1660. Branded by the Puritans as the "cursed sect of heretics," a sea captain could be fined for even having a Quaker on board his ship when he landed at Boston harbor.

But still the Quakers came to America, freedom of religion being one reason, but also to spread their cause and to set up an ideal government, which they did at least in part for several decades in Pennsylvania under the leadership of William Penn, "a holy experiment" he called it. It was the one colony that provided for marriage without benefit of ordained clergy, a Quaker influence. Back home in England where it was against the law to have any religious gathering not under the auspices of the Anglican Church as many as 4,000 Quakers were in prison at one time, 500 of whom did not survive the severity of England's jails, some of which were not cleaned of human excrement for years at a time!

One would suppose that the Quakers would have a heritage of internal unity along with their history of persecution, but they too have divided and subdivided through the years. One reads of Orthodox Quakers, Hicksite Quakers, Wilburite Quakers, etc. There are evangelical and fundamentalist Quakers, premillennial Quakers, and even Quakers that baptize by immersion! While they are one in having "recorded" ministers rather than "ordained" ministers, some "meetings" have both pastor and sermon while most still do not. In his book on the Quakers, Trueblood has a chapter on "A Practical Alternative to Clergy and Laity," in which he calls for the training of all Christians to be ministers, each according to his gifts. He sees this heritage in Quakerism as his church's most practical contribution to Christianity in general.

But still they are united in their humanitarian concerns, in being pacifists, in working for peace, and in the value of silent worship. And there is general agreement that the Inner Spirit, so basic to Quaker thinking, pervades all humanity in some way and is at work in all religions of the world. While their affirmation of "That of God in every man" may have become a cliche (Cadbury called for a moratorium on its use and Trueblood sees it as dangerously humanistic), it nonetheless undergirds their passion for doing good and encourages their ecumenical involvement. It is noteworthy that it was when their leaders questioned the traditional view of the universal pervasiveness of the Inner Light that the Quakers had less passion for deeds of mercy. There has thus been a corollary between their belief of something of God in every person and their commitment to peace and justice. Do we not all learn something from this? One who is cynical about human nature and sees no potential for man's redemption is not likely to be a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize.

And the good that they do around the world is far out of proportion with their small numbers, which is probably no more than 250,000 worldwide. And what they do they do well, such as building colleges. They have ten colleges, all in the United States, all good colleges, some of them outstanding and elite, such as Haverford, Swarthmore, and Earlham. Other famous institutions were started with Quaker money, inspiration, and leadership but are not actually Quaker, such as Cornell, Bryn Mawr, and Johns Hopkins.

The bottom line is that the Quakers are doers, do-gooders in the best sense, as well as thinkers, and we have some things to learn from them. We can all be more conscious of the inner light of Christ that "enlightens every man that comes into the world" (Jn.1:9), especially in reference to the universal search for truth as is evident in all cultures and all religions. They can teach us to love our enemies and to do good to those that persecute us. And they show us that as Christians we all have to be pacifists to some degree, war being what it is. And not least, they can teach us to "aspire to lead a quiet life" (1 Thess. 4:11), which we should have learned long ago.

Finally, we can see in them how important it is to be rebels in our unauthentic world, *quiet* rebels, usually. — *the Editor*

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

Restoration Review, Vol. 31, No. 3, March 1989

WHEN LIFE BEGINS

Cecil Hook

This is not another essay denouncing the horrible abortion epidemic that has swept America in our generation. This deals with a doctrinal dilemma.

I am presuming that you believe in and respect the sanctity of human life that begins at conception. Even though some may question that a new life is formed at the very moment of conception, they can set no definite time between conception and birth as the point of it beginning, and few will contend that it is only at birth that a new human life is initiated.

Here is the doctrinal dilemma. We have taught with much emphasis that a person, in being born of the water and the Spirit, is not in a newness of life until baptism. We have contended that life does not begin with faith, but at baptism. Even though the new birth is analogous to the physical birth, we have been saying that physical life begins at conception and that spiritual life begins at birth.

A baby does not suddenly come to life at birth. Birth does not bestow or initiate life. Birth is the result of life that began at conception. During gestation there are varying stages of development in reaching the point or parturition, or birth. Birth is a confirmation of what has been taking place in the womb and an initiation of the life into a different environment, but it does not make non-life into life.

Because life begins in the womb does not mean that it will be born. It may be aborted at any stage of development, or it may be stillborn. Traditionally, we have not thought of the earliest stages of life as having individuality. In later stages, miscarriages and stillborns have been given names and burials.

Spiritual life is initiated when the sinner begins to believe the gospel. With the first assenting faith, a person becomes a disciple of Christ, a learner. Being begotten, or conceived, by the gospel, a person's faith should continue to develop to the stage of obedience. However, it may be aborted at any point and never be born of the water and the Spirit. As long as the person is growing in belief, and not disbelieving, there is continued life. If that person dies on the way to the baptistry, he dies as a disciple, and there is assurance that God will receive that life. If that learner's faith is aborted, there can be no hope.

Baptism does not give life. The life begins with the conception. Baptism confirms the changes that have been working in the individual in that life process. It becomes a public declaration of the saving faith of the disciple and the Spirit is given as a seal or witness. Baptism is an initiation into a new environment and relationship. Without baptism the life ends. But baptism does not initiate the life. If the believer refuses baptism, he refuses the

continuation of his life. In similar manner, the freedom of Israel from Egypt began and progressed in their faith, their preparation to leave, the Passover, and their move toward the Red Sea. They could have stopped their progress and/or turned back on either side of the Red Sea.

Traditionally, we have let Catholic sacramental concepts influence our thinking concerning baptism. A sacrament is considered to be a specific ritual through which God pours a special grace into the soul. We have long contended that the grace of life is poured into our souls at the moment of baptism while we taught inconsistently at the same time that we are begotten by the word of God. There can be different stages of life but not two beginnings.

Rather than ruling out the necessity of baptism, my teaching here only modifies its meaning and importance. Salvation is by faith which is accepting and obedient. When one reaches a point of disbelieving or disobeying, he no longer has saving faith. The believer who refuses to be baptized reaches that point.

In both the physical and spiritual realms, life begins at conception rather than at birth. Birth does not give life. -*1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

Restoration Review, Vol. 31, No. 3, March 1989

OUR CHANGING WORLD

A new quarterly journal, *Leaven,* will soon come forth as "A Publication for Ministry in the Church of Christ." It announces that *"Leaven* exists to serve leaders of congregations in the Church of Christ through seeking out and making available resources that will help us to more faithfully and skillfully carry out the work of ministry on behalf of Christ." It plans to make audio and video tapes available and it will conduct two annual readers' meetings that will deal with issues in ministry. Twelve people makeup the editorial beard, mostly the younger and more liberal princes who reflect what might be called "the new look" in the Churches of Christ today. This is an encouraging development and we wish it well. The subscription rate is $15.00 a year and the address is 522 Angelina, Arlington, Tx. 76018.

The Nashville Jubilee, sponsored by the Madison Church of Christ, will be celebrated July 6-8 in Nashville's new convention center. It is to be a family affair, part of a great vacation that can include other Nashville attractions, such as Opryland. There will be classes and workshops for all ministries and for all ages. Write to Box 419, Madison, Tn. 37116 for pre-registration information.

To update information on the Stone-Campbell Film Project which we have called to your attention over the past two years: The effort has been hampered by limited funds, but it has adjusted accordingly and expects to have a 30-minute film presentation ready by next fall. Jeanne Lang, a professional actress who directs the project, reports that the film will be "a very human story of a man and his struggles and questions," a reference to Alexander Campbell. Despite the cuts in expenditure she is still resorting to deficit spending. We invite you to join Ouida and me in sending a donation to this worthy project. Address: 3600 Berry Dr., Studio City, Ca. 91604.

I plan to attend an open forum in Indianapolis, March 14-16, hosted by Traders Point Christian Church, 7860 Layfayette Rd. Leaders from Independent Christian Churches and the Church of God, International will discuss such issues as unity, authority, holiness, and the church in an effort to understand each other better. The public is invited.

I also plan, the Lord willing, to be with the Church of Christ, West Morton Rd., in Jacksonville, Illinois, April 28-30. The Christian Church has been invited to meet with us in a study of our common heritage. If you live near enough to join us, you can contact Randall Massie, 217/245-5001 for details.

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

Restoration Review, Vol. 31, No. 3, March 1989

READERS' EXCHANGE

Thank you for the article on your visit to the Unity Church (January, 1989). Your description of them as a "mind cult" could not be more accurate. Both my mother and my brother were under the influence of this cult for two years. They became disillusioned when they learned that they believed that the reason for Jesus' death was solely political. I went to

one of their services and experienced first-hand their mind-twisting techniques. While their name touts unity, their practices demand rigid uniformity. Thanks for exploring other fellowships with as open a mind as possible. — *Bob Mullen, Fayetteville, Ar.*

Your magazine has been a blessing to me. I have studied my way out of legalism, which is appalling to some in my own family. Even though it hurts me to disappoint those that I love, I am determined to continue my study. Truth has become far more important to me than their approval. Thanks for your ongoing commitment to true restoration. — *Kentucky*

I too would like to send flowers to you and Carl Ketcherside. History will regard both of you highly. The sectarian mentality is fast going the way of the dinosaur. Even in our area, which is one of the last strongholds, I can see it disappearing. People are now realizing that unity is a cardinal principle of sound doctrine. — *Randy Travis, Madisonville, Ky.*

Racism remains a big problem in Dallas. Even more dangerous is our city's denial of its existence. The climate in Dallas calls for bold leadership and faithful action. The church must no longer stand silently in the background. If ever there was a time for Christians to "be Jesus" in this city, it is now. —*Larry James, in Richardson East Church of Christ bulletin*

I have enjoyed the series on visits to other churches, especially the point you make that we have much more in common with other believers than differences. I find this true as I serve in the Baptist church in Tulare. The Restoration Movement should have been in the forefront of unity efforts, but we have instead been sectarian and narrow-minded, making ourselves impotent to other believers. — *Bill Johnson, Tulare, Ca.*

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

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BOOK NOTES

Our readers have responded well to Faith Martin's *Call Me Blessed*, which is an enlightening overview of woman's role in the Bible, which she believes has been unduly influenced by our male-dominated culture. It is both a gentle and thoughtful study. $8.95 postpaid.

What the Bible Says About Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage by Olan Hicks is a courageous departure from traditional teaching in Churches of Christ and other churches. He argues persuasively from the Scriptures that all divorced people have the right to marry, and he challenges the notion of "living in adultery." $13.95 postpaid.

We recommend several titles on Restoration history: *Endangered Heritage* by Walt Yancey ($12.95); *Moses Lard, That Prince of Preachers* by Kenneth Van Deusen ($14.95); *The Fool of God* by Louis Cochran, a historical novel on the life of Alexander Campbell ($10.95); *The Sage of Bethany: A Pioneer in Broadcloth* by Perry Gresham, also on Campbell ($12.95); *The Well Ordered Home, Alexander Campbell and the Family,* by Edwin Groover ($12.95).

We will send you 18 back issues of this journal, selected at random by us, for only $3.00. Some issues go back 20 years and more, ideal for newer readers who would like to see what we have been saying through the years.

The Australian *Christian* recently told its readers *about The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett, offering it at a higher price than it is in America. The price may be dear, the journal said, but it is worth it, and went on to highly recommend it. If they are reading it in Australia, perhaps you should read it, and at only $21.95 postpaid for 739 pages. Or you can still get a free copy when you send us 8 subs to this journal at $3.00 each (total of $24.00), new or renewal, including your own.

You may order all five of our bound volumes of *Restoration Review,* which include the years 1977-1984, for only $40.00 postpaid. These are hard bound, matching volumes of high quality, with dust jackets.

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